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DE RUEHUB #0996 2891548
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 161548Z OCT 07
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2393
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000996

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2017
TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: IF YOU INVITE THEM, THEY WILL COME

Classified By: CDA: James L. Williams: For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Charg d'Affaires hosted an Iftar dinner for the diplomatic community on October 9. The 54 guests in attendance included 11 ambassadors and five charges from 22 countries, most of them with large Muslim populations. The event--the first of its kind offered by USINT--drew favorable responses from all guests and at least one offer to host or co-host a similar gathering next year. The lone negative note was the absence of Havana's Imam, with whom the post had closely coordinated arrangements and who had supplied a recording of verses from the Qur'an for the event. Otherwise, this Iftar stood out for its large attendance and enthusiastic response. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On Tuesday, October 9, the Charg d'Affaires hosted an Iftar dinner for the diplomatic community at the COM residence. The 54 guests in attendance included 11 ambassadors and five charges. In total, 22 countries were represented, most of which have large or majority Muslim populations. With the exception of Indonesia, all of the 23 diplomatic missions sent representatives. In his short remarks in Arabic and Spanish of "Ramadan Kareem," the Charg highlighted the spirit of friendship and religious tolerance that inspired the event.

¶3. (SBU) Many guests commented favorably on the Iftar. The newly-arrived Lebanese ambassador and his wife said they felt honored to be invited by non-Muslim Americans to an observance of Ramadan. The Gambian ambassador said he felt very much at home in such a gathering, and the usually shy Syrian ambassador relaxed and chatted amiably with the other guests as the evening wore on. His extroverted Indian counterpart stated that an Iftar should be an annual event on Havana's diplomatic calendar and offered to co-host a similar gathering next Ramadan. Another guest suggested that the responsibility be rotated among interested missions. All in all, comments from the guests--many of whom were not Muslims themselves--were overwhelmingly favorable (although some wondered innocently at the absence of the Iranian ambassador).

¶4. (SBU) The lone negative note from USINT's perspective was the failure of Cuban Islamic League President Imam Yahya Lazo to attend. The Iftar had been planned in close consultation with the Imam, who provided guidance on protocol issues and the menu, and who even lent USINT a recording of verses from the Qur'an to be played in the background. Subsequently, in a letter addressed to the Charg, the Imam explained that his absence was due to the death of the wife of a friend.

¶5. C) Post believes that this initial attempt to host an Iftar was a resounding success. The large turnout, the universally positive comments from the guests, and the offers to host or co-host future iterations all lead us to believe that it was the right gesture at the right time. It was also ample proof that, despite pressure to do otherwise, our

colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps will attend our events. By contrast, Cuban invitees may have no choice but to succumb to such pressures. The Imam's absence may be as innocent as his explanation, but we suspect he may have been instructed to find an excuse.

WILLIAMS